

REMARKS ON A BILL,

&c.



# REMARKS

ON

A BILL FOR AUTHORIZING THE  
ADMISSION

OF

CANADIAN CORN,

AT ALL TIMES,

ON PAYMENT OF A CERTAIN DUTY.

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THE bill for authorizing the admission of Canadian corn at all times, on payment of a certain duty, appearing to be viewed with much distrust, as a measure likely to be prejudicial to the agricultural interests of England, it is important to consider what are the inducements to that particular relaxation of the corn laws; and what foundation there is for the apprehension that ill consequences will arise from it to the landholders in this country.

Upon the first point so much might be stated, and with truth, that to urge to the full extent every consideration in favour of the proposed relaxation, would appear to some persons, to give to that view of the subject an undue degree of importance, and it might probably subject the discussion, however dispassionate, to the suspicion of being intended rather to obviate, by in-

genious reasoning, the objections to a favourite measure, than to place fairly and equally in view the advantages and disadvantages which might attend it.

Indeed, the discussions to which the question has given rise in Parliament, and the very generous sentiments which have been there expressed in favour of an indulgent policy towards the colonies, leaves scarcely a pretence for insisting upon arguments which have been so clearly and strongly urged, and which seem to be very generally acquiesced in, though an evident desire is shewn to avert the conclusion to which they appear almost inevitably to lead.

The objections urged against the relaxation, call more for discussion than the arguments in support of it; but to be enabled to judge more of the reasons on either side, it is necessary to be correctly informed upon some points, which have not perhaps been sufficiently considered.

Lower Canada, though a colony of great extent, produces at present no very great quantity of marketable corn, considering the number of its inhabitants. It does not in that respect rank with Upper Canada, and the probability is that, as it advances in population, the comparative disproportion between it, and the upper province, in respect to the surplus production of grain suited to foreign markets, will be more in favour of the latter. The climate of Lower Canada generally

does not appear to admit of the growth of wheat of so good a description as that which is produced in the United States, and Upper Canada, and in those countries of Europe from which, under certain circumstances, the markets of England are occasionally supplied. The greater quantity raised is of a kind of spring wheat, not usually cultivated in good wheat countries, and is a tough, shrivelled grain, not yielding so great a quantity, nor so good a quality of flour as the winter wheat raised in milder climates.

It does not seem very probable that a sufficient inducement will exist in ordinary times, for transporting grain of an inferior quality to England, with the charge of freight, and the proposed import duty attached to it, while a more suitable, and probably a more profitable market will be generally found for it, in the consumption of the people of the province, and in the colonies of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, where, from the nature of the countries, and the occupations of a great portion of the people, much of the bread stuffs consumed is imported from abroad. So far as England is concerned, it is to be observed, that the only effect of this course of things, would be to give to a greater proportion of the grain produced in Upper Canada occasion to seek a trans-atlantic market, and it becomes, therefore, the more material to consider the question closely, *as it regards*



*Upper Canada*, and taking it, in this view, for granted, that *her* surplus produce will generally be destined to the more distant markets of England, and of the West Indian colonies, to ascertain of what importance it will be to the prosperity of that colony, that the proposed bill should take effect, and what consequence would be likely to ensue, in *this country*, from the change.

Upper Canada, speaking of that portion of it, only, which can ever be brought under cultivation, is not a country of such almost boundless extent as seems to be generally imagined. It lies within the Lakes Erie, Huron, and Ontario, and between the River St. Lawrence, and the Ottawa, or Grand River; the country beyond these limits, although it forms geographically a part of the province, being, so far as it has been hitherto explored, rocky and barren. This reduces Upper Canada, in fact, to an area of about 45, or 50,000 square miles, an extent not widely differing from that of England, or of the single state of New York. The consideration of this fact is very important, as it goes far to refute the common-place objection to all sacrifices made by the parent state, for the promotion of Canadian interests, on the ground that, in the natural progress of things, Canada must outgrow her subjection as a colony, and become, like the United States independent. Less in extent than several among the many states of North America,



Upper Canada is still large enough to form a most valuable colony, and one from its position peculiarly valuable to the empire, but it is not large enough, considering the disadvantage of its inland situation, to be ever independent of the British empire for protection against the ambition of the American republic.

As to the other possible contingency of Upper Canada, desiring to become a part of that republic, and renouncing her connexion with the British crown, every motive of interest can be so easily shewn to be decidedly against it, and the fact is so clearly understood and felt to be so, that, building nothing upon a supposed preference of monarchical institutions, or a loyal and grateful sense of former protection, it is most unreasonable ever to contemplate such an event.

Considering Upper Canada, then, in the same light as other British colonies in this respect, it is to be borne in mind that, from its peculiar situation, it is highly politic to increase its strength by accelerating its population. It now contains about 180,000 inhabitants, who are thinly dispersed along a frontier of nearly six hundred miles upon the rivers and lakes which separate Upper Canada from the United States. The province certainly produces a surplus quantity of corn, but not so great a surplus as it did, twelve or fifteen years ago, and this from two causes.

1st. In some measure, because the policy pur-

sued at that time by the United States, was most favourable to Upper Canada, as it left to her a market in the West Indies, which the American Government, by their embargo, prevented their own citizens from supplying, and the great prices thus afforded stimulated the Canadian farmers to increased exertion. 2dly. There was then comparatively little emigration from Europe, and the increase of population being more gradual, the producers outnumbered the mere consumers in a greater ratio. At present the quantity of corn, or rather of flour, exported from Upper Canada, is but inconsiderable, and this has been so for some years past. Of the 180,000 inhabitants, a very great proportion consists of persons lately arrived in the country, who are, for a long period, unable to bring much surplus wheat into the market, and are, for the first two or three years, consumers to a considerable extent beyond their production. The use of wheaten bread in Upper Canada is universal; and as, for a very considerable period, the new settler finds it more convenient for his family to appropriate the ground which he can clear of timber to the purpose of growing grass and hay for the support of cows and working cattle, than to attempt raising any large quantity of grain, it follows that a numerous accession of emigrants has not the rapid effect one would suppose in increasing those productions of the country which

are sent to foreign markets. So soon, however, as the emigrant is in a condition to raise a considerable quantity of wheat, nothing can contribute so surely and directly to his prosperity as the certainty of finding a remunerating price for as much as he can spare of it.

Looking to the probable accession of casual emigrants, to the extent of seven or eight thousand annually, and considering the probability that this number may be considerably augmented by continued emigration from Ireland, under the direction of the Government, it is not likely that this surplus would be found to be very considerable for a few years to come. But whatever it might be, the prospect of a certain market for it would immediately stimulate those already engaged in agriculture to industrious exertion; it would encourage the emigrant to earlier and greater efforts to rise above the mere capability of supplying his own immediate wants; and, above all, it would lead persons of a more intelligent and respectable description, and possessed of some little capital, to resort to Canada, rather than to the United States. If it were found that the average price of corn in England, through a series of years, afforded a fully remunerating price to the grower in Upper Canada, and if the quantity to be admitted were unlimited, it would not be long before the province would be enabled

to supply a very considerable quantity—enough to make its exchange for British manufactures by no means an unworthy object of national attention.

Not entering at present into the question, what occasion of alarm, and what just cause of remonstrance, such a state of things might supply to the English landholder, it is at least most gratifying to anticipate the gradual and certain progress of the colony in prosperity under such a system.

For some years past, and, indeed, since the general peace, the market for flour in Canada has been extremely fluctuating—frequently very low, and always most precarious; insomuch so, that the farmers (especially in the western parts of the province) have found it more profitable to forbear exporting their surplus wheat to Montreal, where it frequently remains for months unsold, and is at last disposed of at a positive loss, and to manufacture it into whiskey instead, an article which unhappily, from its cheapness, finds too ready a sale. The increased manufacture of whiskey induced by this temptation supersedes, to a great extent, the consumption of rum—a consequence which is not only injurious to the revenue, but diminishes a very valuable branch of trade with other colonies of the empire, whose present circumstances are not so prosperous, but that a rapidly-increasing demand from countries not

very distant, which must soon be so populous, is an object worthy of their solicitude, and of national concern.

It is to be observed, that it is to the market for grain the farmer of Upper Canada has to look, almost exclusively, for the means of enabling him to purchase articles of foreign importation. The salted beef and pork of Ireland, protected as the trade in it is by various enactments of the British Parliament, and produced, as it is, under very favourable circumstances, can find its way to the only foreign markets to which Canada can look for purchasers of such commodities, on terms which preclude the beef and pork of the latter country from competition. If wheat, the only other agricultural production fitted for foreign trade to any great extent, were to be at all times admissible in England, one article, and that the most important, would at least be certain to find a market, though not always, perhaps, a profitable one, and the farmer would cultivate his land not in utter uncertainty of being able to dispose, on any terms, of its produce.

There is no measure, certainly, which it is in the power of the mother country to extend to these valuable provinces, that would be so gratefully received, and so generally and extensively beneficial.

The value of lands would speedily rise. This would induce the circulation of capital, and the

more general division of landed property; and the incitement to industry would lead to an improvement in the circumstances of the poorer classes.

It is clear that nothing could more strikingly convince the people of Canada of their good fortune in belonging to the British empire, than the enjoyment of benefits which they could not receive from any other nation, and which, as an independent people, they could not confer upon themselves; and, in this point of view, if an additional motive were wanting, the strongest is supplied for their desiring to maintain their connexion with the British crown.

If it should be found that the admission of Canadian corn hereafter, without limitation, should be consistent with the general interests of this country, and if the price here should be generally sufficient to remunerate the Canadian farmer, the obvious consequence would be, that a great and increasing free population of a description that would desire to consume liberally all the principal manufactures of Great Britain would be enabled to pay for those manufactures, and would become by that means very great encouragers of the commerce and shipping of the parent state. And it is not immaterial to consider that Upper Canada is less likely than almost any other colony, ever to attempt competition with Great Britain, in any article of manufacture,

since, besides that the price of labour must, for a very long time, be higher in Upper Canada, her inland situation would occasion a very heavy charge upon the importation of the raw material, which it would always be better policy to pay upon the manufactured article. With respect to the United States, which comprise within their territory such various climates, that cotton and almost every material for manufacture can be produced at home, and which have sea-ports at all times accessible to foreign trade, it is obvious that the case is so different, as not to admit of a just comparison—and yet, even in those states, with capital and enterprise much greater than Canada can be expected to exhibit for several generations, it is seen how unsuccessful is the attempt to exclude, by heavy duties, the manufactures of Great Britain, and to substitute their own in their room.

With the certainty, then, that Canada must continue to look to Great Britain, or her possessions, for almost every important article of consumption beyond her own mere agricultural produce, and with the assurance that her demand for consumption must soon become immense, it cannot be doubted that besides the welfare of the colony itself, great national interests would inevitably be promoted, by enabling her to pay for what she can consume, and thus suffering her to increase her consumption in proportion to her



wants, rather than compel her to restrict it within the limit of her means to purchase.

But it is said that these advantages to the colonies, and to particular interests of the empire, ought not to be purchased by a ruinous sacrifice of the interests of the landholders in Great Britain—and much danger is apprehended from the lowering of prices by the competition of Canadian corn in the English markets, and, perhaps, even more by the illegal introduction of American corn imported into Canada, and shipped to Great Britain as colonial produce.

Upon the general principle, whether it is right so to endanger the interests of the landed proprietor, it is to be considered that, of late years, and never more liberally than at the present moment, commercial restrictions, contrived to secure monopolies to the English manufacturer, merchant, and ship owner, are in a course of abolition, one by one. Particular interests are affected, and particular classes alarmed by every such innovation, but they are constantly told that free trade and open competition will be found, in the end, prejudicial to none; and that if their immediate adoption can be shewn to be beneficial to the community at large, partial interests must submit for the general good.

If then the first attempt at giving a free trade in corn with those colonies, upon which, let it

be remembered, Great Britain forces her manufactures, shall be successfully resisted in Parliament, how can the inference be repelled, that it is only from the circumstance that the other particular classes of persons whose interests are involved in the experiments now making are not so largely represented as the agricultural, that they are forced to submit to those experiments, while the fear of their being supplied more cheaply with bread, in return for the reduction in the prices of [their manufactures, which foreign competition may occasion, is sufficient to prevent the principles of free trade from becoming so general, as to bring their soundness fairly to the test.

As to the reasonableness of the particular grounds on which opposition is raised, it must be admitted to be true in principle, that in as much as Canada does not bear her share in the general burdens of the empire, she has no *right* to claim that Great Britain shall not so regulate her consumption, as to give the supply to her own farmers. No such claim has ever been advanced, the right has never been disputed by the colony. If it had been, that very circumstance might almost justify of itself, a perseverance in the system. But, although Canada has no pretence for claiming the *right* to a free trade in corn, there may be strong reasons for expecting it as an indulgence.

It is true she pays no taxes into the treasury of Great Britain, but, so far as her resources will permit, she supports a government appointed by the mother country,—and, what is of infinitely more weight in this particular question, her trade is subjected to restrictions of which she does not complain, in order to favour the general commercial interests of Great Britain. She is compelled (with some exceptions) to take her foreign merchandise from England, and to receive it by the channel which England prescribes. She borders upon a foreign nation intervening between her and the Atlantic, through which she cannot import any one production of Europe, but must receive them through Quebec, a port open but for half the year, and at an expense of transport up the St. Lawrence, which, with respect to many articles, is altogether out of proportion with the first cost. These restrictions excite no discontent in Canada; they are felt to be a reasonable tribute for protection, but they certainly do seem to give some ground to His Majesty's subjects in that colony, to hope for such regulations in return, as may enable them to become sellers in almost the only markets in which they dare be buyers.

The question too, it should be remembered, lies almost wholly between Great Britain and Canada. As a precedent for other colonies, to ask for the same indulgence, it affords but little occasion for alarm.

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have no surplus grain. They have always received flour from Canada and the United States, and are less likely to have a surplus as population increases. If, indeed, the fisheries in the Gulph of St. Lawrence could be made more extensive by any national encouragement, these colonies would furnish an increasing market for the surplus grain of Canada, and lessen the dreaded competition, rather than add to it. New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land, the only other colonies of England which are capable of producing grain to any great extent, are certainly too remote to afford reasonable ground of alarm to English agriculturists.

But it is said that Upper Canada alone will soon export such quantities as to "overpower this country with its produce." Such a fear must for many years be chimerical. Hitherto, while the ports were open, the two provinces have never exported so much in any one year as to supply two days' consumption to the population of England; and, if it be true that Canada is in a course of rapid settlement, that circumstance will, as it has been stated, go very far to retard for some time the evil apprehended, (if it be an evil,) by increasing the proportion of consumers at home, who must for a while be unproductive.

When, however, after a lapse of years, a great surplus shall be furnished, it will by no means

follow that, to make the proposed bill beneficial to Canada, the whole, or even a great part of this surplus must find its way into the markets of England.

On the contrary, frequently a small proportion, and sometimes none of it, might be so disposed of, and yet the knowledge that the ports are open might produce all the encouragement the inhabitants of Canada desire. The great good of having the trade with England on this liberal and uniform footing would be that, with the certainty of a market upon some terms, though they might be unprofitable, the farmer would sow with less hesitation, and the merchant purchase with less reserve. A quantity might thus be reckoned upon, which might suffice to supply the consumption of the West Indies, or enable the Canadian merchant to form considerable contracts with other foreign countries, to which the United States usually transport their produce; and it is very clear that, unless the market of England afforded a remunerating price, none would be sent there that could be otherwise disposed of. Now, that in ordinary times there might not be an inducement to send corn from Canada to England, is pretty evident, from the circumstance that, three or four years ago, several shipments of English wheat were made from Poole in Dorsetshire to Newfoundland; and, indeed, if by the certainty of a market upon some terms, the

Canadian farmer is encouraged to raise such a quantity that the West Indies can safely look to Canada for their supply, it is most probable that, in general, that market and the fisheries in the St. Lawrence will for many years absorb the surplus produce of the provinces.

In Upper Canada, a dollar (which passes current there for four and sixpence, sterling) per bushel, or thirty-four shillings sterling per quarter, is generally considered a fair price for wheat to be paid by the merchant in the interior. The expense of transporting it to Quebec, and shipping it to England, may be stated at about two and sixpence per bushel, or twenty shillings per quarter, which with the five shillings duty on importation, would require a price of fifty-seven per quarter, exclusive of all intermediate profits of merchants, commission of consignees, &c., and risk of injury in so long a voyage; so that it will be readily seen, that it can only be when the prices in England are reasonably high, that much encouragement will be held out to the Canadian farmer, to crowd the markets of England with his produce.

The high price of labour in Canada, the expense of inland transport, and the charge and risk of damage in a long voyage, added to the import duty, do not seem to give to the Irish or the English agriculturist, under every pressure of taxes and rents, much reason to look with jea-

lousy on the probable comparative advantage of his fellow-subjects of Canada, in the markets of the mother country, from whence he is compelled to derive his principal supplies of manufactured goods.

That the fear of an almost immediate influx of a great quantity of Canadian corn into the English market is utterly groundless, may be best proved, by shewing that, although no proportion of improved lands in Upper Canada has been suffered in past years to lie idle, the average amount of corn exported from Quebec to all parts of the world does not, as it appears, exceed 75,000 quarters. It does not seem that the means exist in England of referring to official returns for this information, but in a calendar for Upper Canada, published by the King's printer, is a table, transcribed, no doubt, from one officially published, in which the whole value of exports from Quebec, in the year 1824, in *grain, flour, meal, and biscuit*, is stated at £77,273, of which not quite £7000 was exported *in grain*.

This exhibition of the amount of grain and flour exported from Quebec in 1824, proves satisfactorily one very important fact, namely, that there is not much ground for the apprehension expressed that American wheat will be illicitly introduced into Canada in great quantities, and exported to England as colonial produce. Surely the discriminating duty of 5*s.* per barrel,



which was imposed by the British Act of 1822 on flour from the United States entering the West Indian markets, furnished the American farmer on the banks of the Ontario and St. Lawrence with as strong an inducement to attempt thus to introduce his flour as Canadian produce along that channel, to the sea which to him was the cheapest and most convenient to the very market, to which, if he did not violate the law, he was most likely to export it by a more expensive route, and under the disadvantage of a heavy duty. Yet we find that the people of the State of New York have been incessantly representing to the general Government that that section of their country *is precluded* by the Act of 1822 from the market they had before resorted to; and we find, also, that in fact much less grain was actually exported from Quebec than the stated average of former years.

It is erroneously conceived that the great canal in the State of New York, leading from Lake Erie to the sea, will afford facilities to the Americans in pouring their corn into Canada for the purposes of exportation. In truth, the undertaking that work showed a conviction in America that it was prudent to provide for the transport of their productions to their own Atlantic ports, rather than to depend upon an outlet which might be, as they complain it has been, shut against them. When the American produce

enters that canal, it in fact departs from those waters by which it had formerly descended, and by which it might be borne into Canada. It is to be remarked, besides, that unless one can anticipate prices in England which should satisfy the landholder, there is reason to believe, from the experience of the two or three past years, that a stronger inducement would exist for the Canadian to desire the introduction of his wheat into the American canal, than for the American to seek the port of Quebec.

That the Legislature of Upper Canada would desire very earnestly to secure to themselves the full benefit of the English market, by excluding American wheat from a participation in the advantage, is very evident from the policy they have hitherto pursued. Before the Imperial Parliament had imposed any discriminating duty between American and Canadian wheat received at Quebec or in the West Indies, the Legislature of Upper Canada had, by various acts, imposed duties amounting to prohibition, in order to exclude it from her markets; and it has not appeared, by the amount of exports from Quebec, or by other evidence, that these regulations have been evaded to any extent. Seizures of other articles for breach of the revenue laws are frequently made in Upper Canada, but I remember but one of flour, and none of wheat, and I am satisfied there would be found no difficulty in

preventing the admission of American wheat in any great quantity, especially if the inducements to vigilance were made as strong as possible, by extending the admission of Canadian wheat only to a certain quantity.

A difficulty presents itself in the way of such a limitation, in the consideration that the grower would be uncertain whether the whole or any part of his produce would come within the quantity, and an unsteadiness and uncertainty would be occasioned in the colonial market that might be most inconvenient. But if the importation into England were restricted to one port, for instance, Bristol,—and if the corn arriving after 200,000, or other limited number, of quarters, had been received, were not to be *excluded*, but *admitted*, paying a higher duty,—the measure would, in that shape, be found much less inconvenient in practice.

In all that has been said, the terms *corn* and *grain* have been made use of, and indeed the Bill extends not to flour; but, as it is by no means clear, on the one hand, that such a deviation from the ordinary course of trade in Canada as would require the article to be exported in grain would be attended with all the benefits which have been anticipated, so, on the other, the great probability *that it would not*, may better reconcile the landholder in England to a measure which

may not, in practice, be available to any great extent in its present shape.

A compromise hereafter, by limiting the quantity, and authorizing the admission of flour as well as grain, would place the measure on a footing that would probably make it more acceptable to the colony, while it would certainly leave no ground for apprehension of material injury to the English agriculturist,—not even on the ground of precedent, because, as it has been remarked already, so long as the precedent is confined to our colonies, it can lead to nothing very much beyond the measure which is now proposed.

J. B. R.

June 3, 1824.

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